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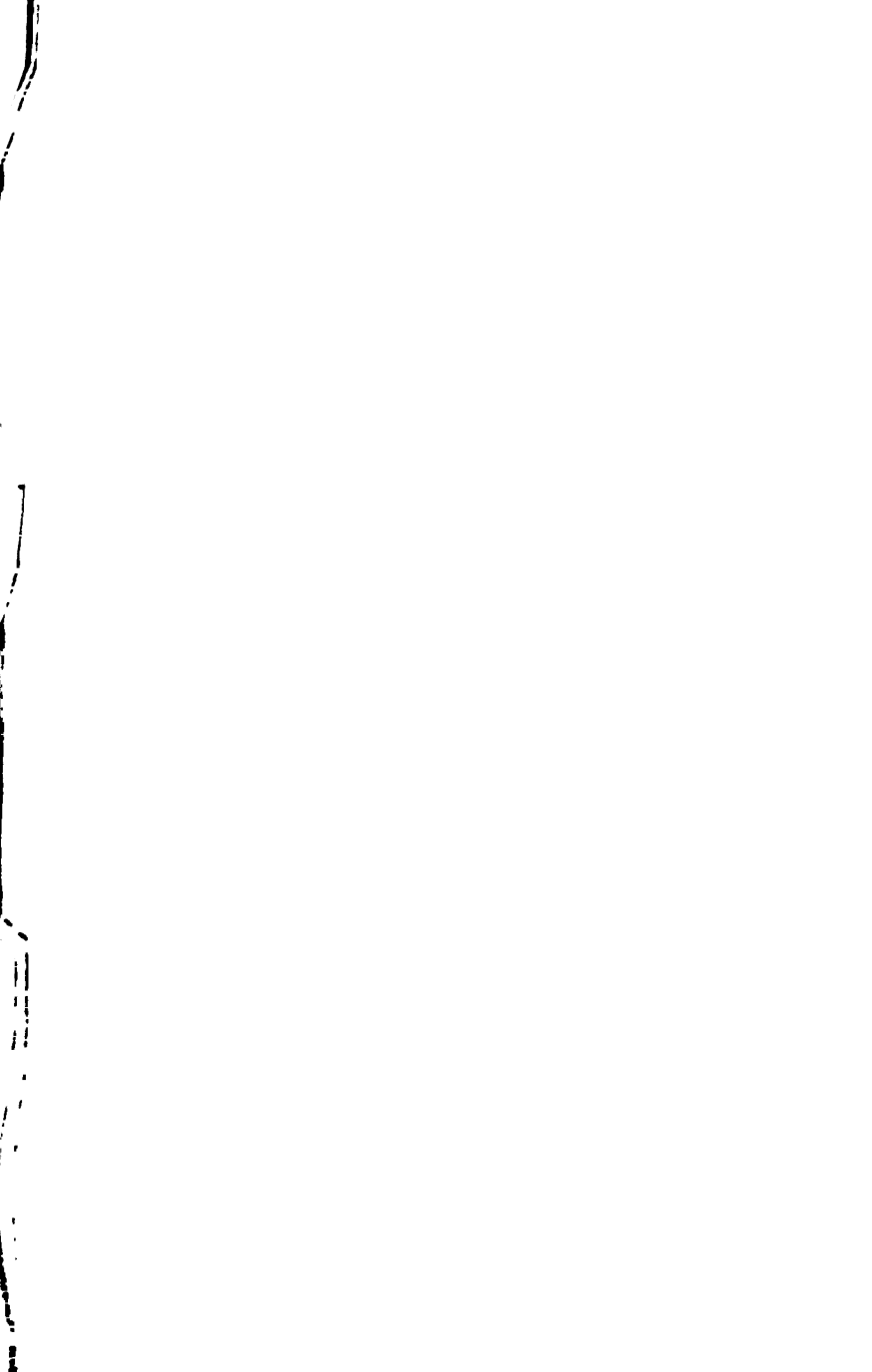
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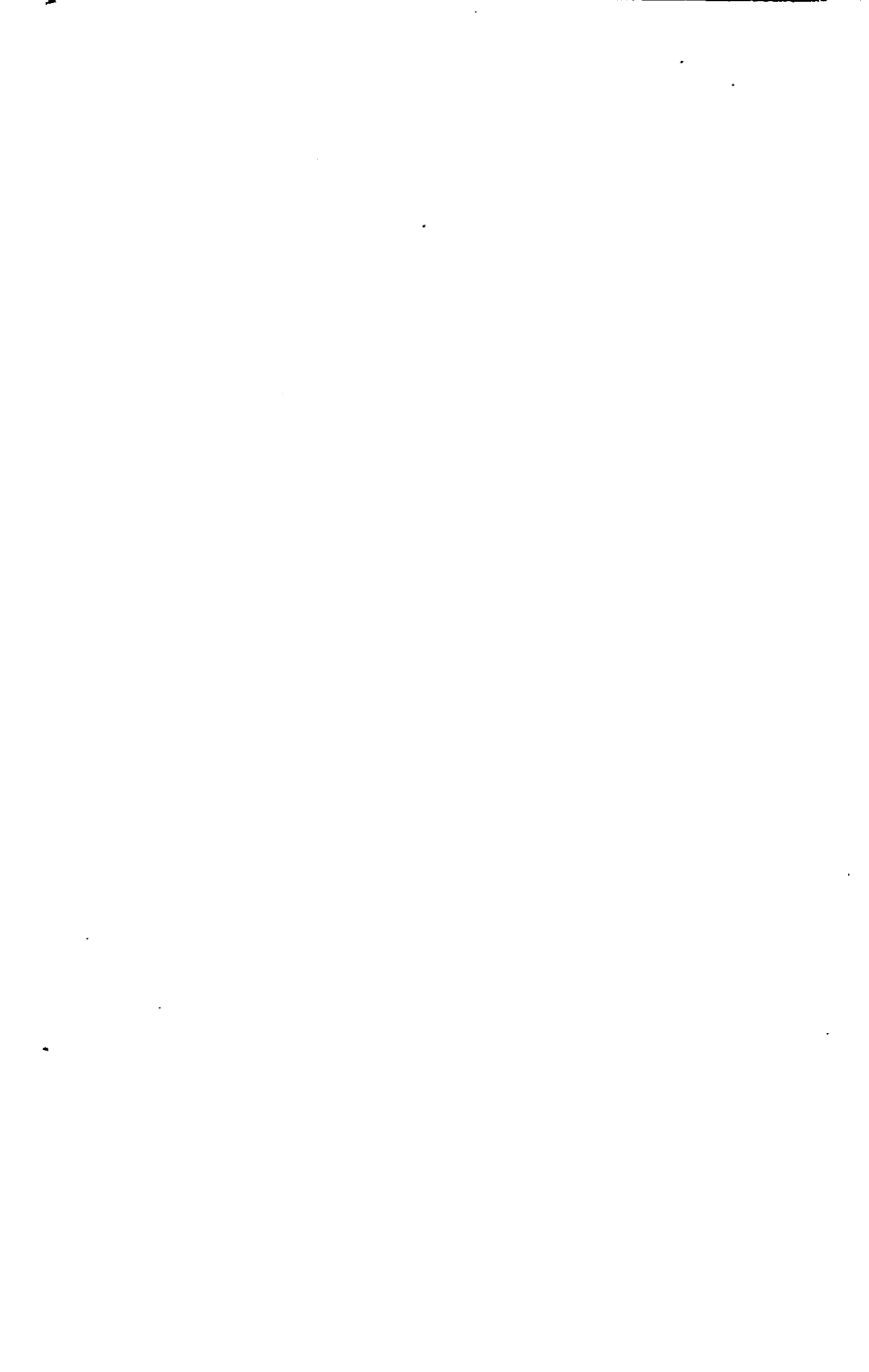


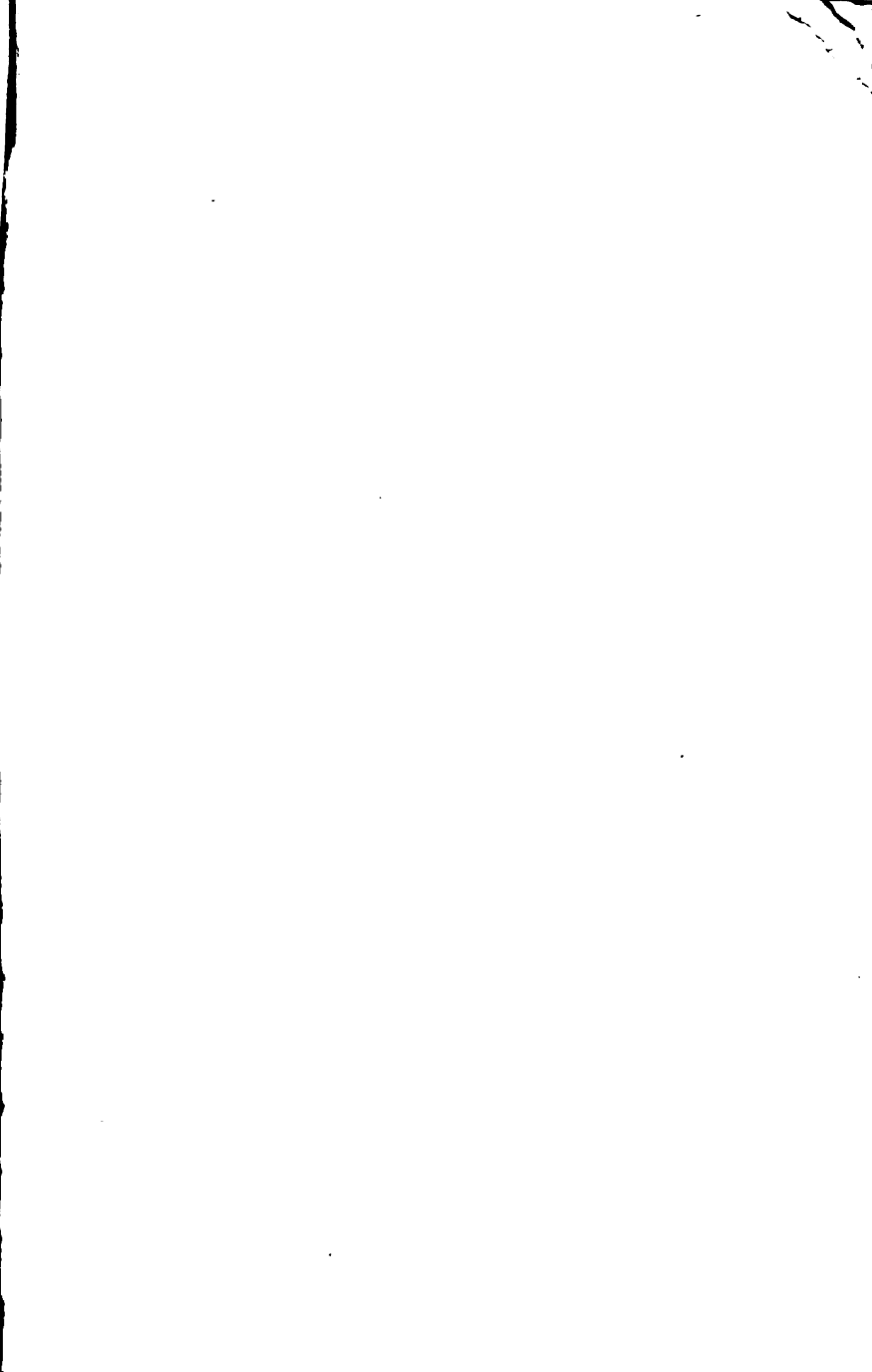
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THE MUCKER







**Byrne, escaping the furious cut of the parang, leaped
to the savage Malay's neck**

[Page 159]

THE MUCKER

BY
EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

AUTHOR OF
THE TARZAN AND THE MARTIAN STORIES

ILLUSTRATED BY
J. ALLEN ST. JOHN



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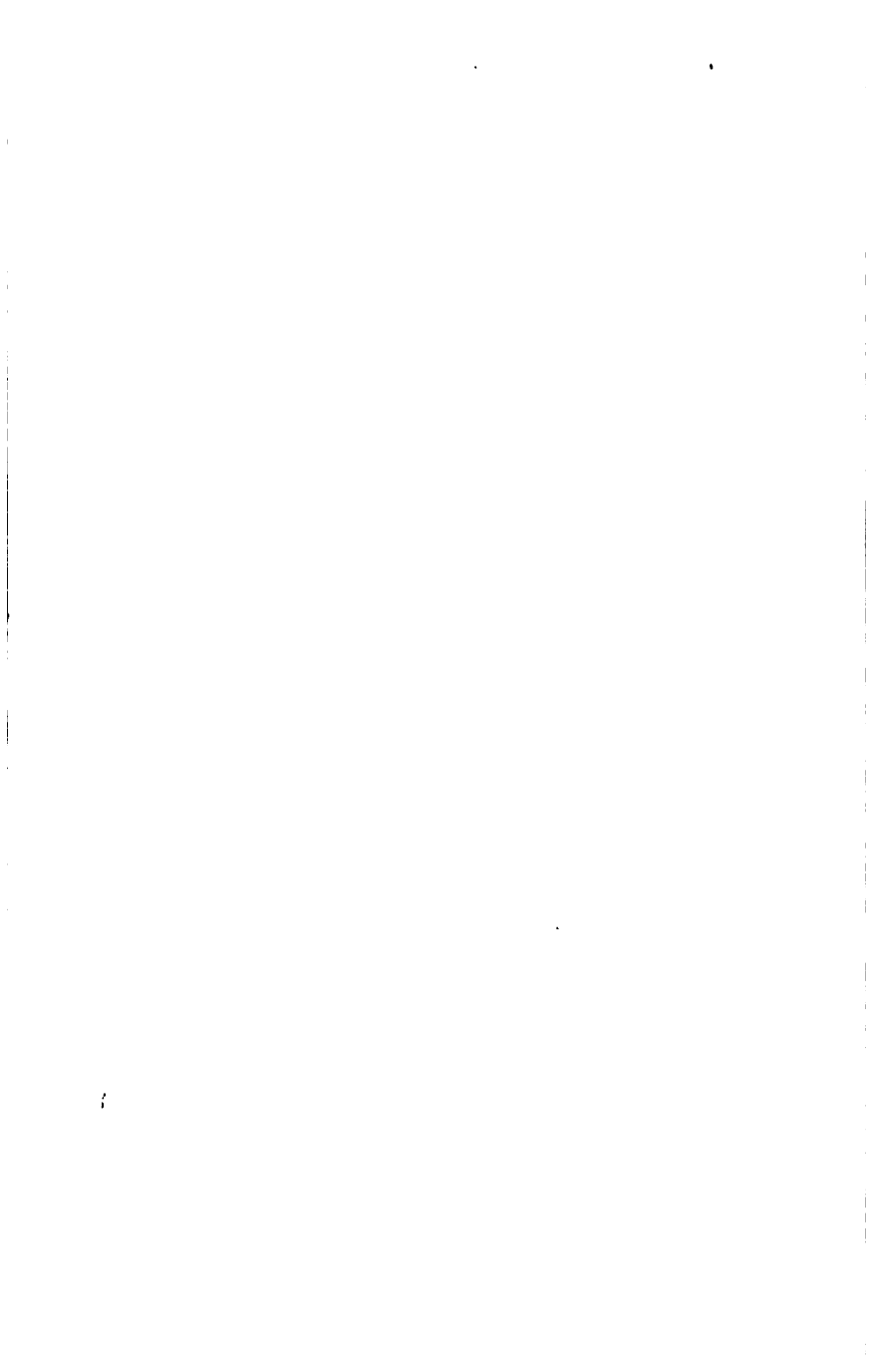
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Part I



The Mucker

CHAPTER I

BILLY BYRNE

BILLY BYRNE was a product of the streets and alleys of Chicago's great West Side. From Halsted to Robey, and from Grand Avenue to Lake Street there was scarce a bartender whom Billy knew not by his first name. And, in proportion to their number which was considerably less, he knew the patrolmen and plain clothes men equally as well, but not so pleasantly.

His kindergarten education had commenced in an alley back of a feed-store. Here a gang of older boys and men were wont to congregate at such times as they had naught else to occupy their time, and as the bridewell was the only place in which they ever held a job for more than a day or two, they had considerable time to devote to congregating.

They were pickpockets and second-story men, made and in the making, and all were muckers, ready to insult the first woman who passed, or pick a quarrel with any stranger who did not appear too burly. By night they plied their real vocations. By day they sat in the alley behind the feed-store and drank beer from a battered tin pail.

The question of labor involved in transporting the pail, empty, to the saloon across the street, and returning it, full, to the alley back of the feed-store was solved by the presence

of admiring and envious little boys of the neighborhood whung, wide-eyed and thrilled, about these heroes of their childish lives.

Billy Byrne, at six, was rushing the can for this noble band, and incidentally picking up his knowledge of life and the rudiments of his education. He gloried in the fact that he was personally acquainted with "Eddie" Welch, and that with his own ears he had heard "Eddie" tell the gang how he stuck up a guy on West Lake Street within fifty yards of the Twenty-eighth Precinct Police Station.

The kindergarten period lasted until Billy was ten; then he commenced "swiping" brass faucets from vacant buildings and selling them to a fence who ran a junkshop on Lincoln Street near Kinzie.

From this man he obtained the hint that graduated him to a higher grade, so that at twelve he was robbing freight cars in the yards along Kinzie Street, and it was about this same time that he commenced to find pleasure in the feel of his fist against the jaw of a fellow-man.

He had had his boyish scraps with his fellows off and on ever since he could remember; but his first real fight came when he was twelve. He had had an altercation with an erstwhile pal over the division of the returns from some freight-car booty. The gang was all present, and as words quickly gave place to blows, as they have a habit of doing in certain sections of the West Side, the men and boys formed a rough ring about the contestants.

The battle was a long one. The two were rolling about in the dust of the alley quite as often as they were upon their feet exchanging blows. There was nothing fair, nor decent, nor scientific about their methods. They gouged and bit and tore. They used knees and elbows and feet, and but for the timely presence of a brickbat beneath his fingers at the psychological moment Billy Byrne would have gone

down to humiliating defeat. As it was the other boy went down, and for a week Billy remained hidden by one of the gang pending the report from the hospital.

When word came that the patient would live, Billy felt an immense load lifted from his shoulders, for he dreaded arrest and experience with the law that he had learned from childhood to deride and hate. Of course there was the loss of prestige that would naturally have accrued to him could he have been pointed out as the "guy that croaked Sheehan;" but there is always a fly in the ointment, and Billy only sighed and came out of his temporary retirement.

That battle started Billy to thinking, and the result of that mental activity was a determination to learn to handle his mitts scientifically — people of the West Side do not have hands; they are equipped by Nature with mitts and dukes. A few have paws and flippers.

He had no opportunity to realize his new dream for several years; but when he was about seventeen a neighbor's son surprised his little world by suddenly developing from an unknown teamster into a locally famous light-weight.

The young man never had been affiliated with the gang, as his escutcheon was defiled with a record of steady employment. So Billy had known nothing of the sparring lessons his young neighbor had taken, or of the work he had done at the down-town gymnasium of Larry Hilmore.

Now it happened that while the new light-weight was unknown to the charmed circle of the gang, Billy knew him fairly well by reason of the proximity of their respective parental back yards, and so when the glamour of pugilistic success haloed the young man Billy lost no time in basking in the light of reflected glory.

He saw much of his new hero all the following winter. He accompanied him to many mills, and on one glorious occasion occupied a position in the coming champion's corner.

When the prize fighter toured, Billy continued to hang around Hilmore's place, running errands and doing odd jobs the while he picked up pugilistic lore, and absorbed the spirit of the game along with the rudiments and finer points of its science, almost unconsciously. Then his ambition changed. Once he had longed to shine as a gunman; now he was determined to become a prize fighter; but the old gang still saw much of him, and he was a familiar figure about the saloon corners along Grand Avenue and Lake Street.

During this period Billy neglected the box cars on Kinzie Street, partially because he felt that he was fitted for more dignified employment, and as well for the fact that the railroad company had doubled the number of watchmen in the yards; but there were times when he felt the old yearning for excitement and adventure. These times were usually coincident with an acute financial depression in Billy's change pocket, and then he would fare forth in the still watches of the night, with a couple of boon companions and roll a souse or stick up a saloon.

It was upon an occasion of this nature that an event occurred which was fated later to change the entire course of Billy Byrne's life. Upon the West Side the older gangs are jealous of the sanctity of their own territory. Outsiders do not trespass with impunity. From Halsted to Robey, and from Lake to Grand lay the broad hunting preserve of Kelly's gang, to which Billy had been almost born, one might say. Kelly owned the feed-store back of which the gang had loafed for years, and though himself a respectable business man his name had been attached to the pack of hoodlums who held forth at his back door as the easiest means of locating and identifying its motley members.

The police and citizenry of this great territory were the natural enemies and prey of Kelly's gang, but as the kings

of old protected the deer of their great forests from poachers, so Kelly's gang felt it incumbent upon them to safeguard the lives and property which they considered theirs by divine right. It is doubtful that they thought of the matter in just this way, but the effect was the same.

And so it was that as Billy Byrne wended homeward alone in the wee hours of the morning after emptying the cash drawer of old Schneider's saloon and locking the weeping Schneider in his own ice box, he was deeply grieved and angered to see three rank outsiders from Twelfth Street beating Patrolman Stanley Lasky with his own baton, the while they simultaneously strove to kick in his ribs with their heavy boots.

Now Lasky was no friend of Billy Byrne; but the officer had been born and raised in the district and was attached to the Twenty-eighth Precinct Station on Lake Street near Ashland Avenue, and so was part and parcel of the natural possession of the gang. Billy felt that it was entirely ethical to beat up a cop, provided you confined your efforts to those of your own district; but for a bunch of yaps from south of Twelfth Street to attempt to pull off any such coarse work in *his* bailiwick — why it was unthinkable.

A hero and rescuer of lesser experience than Billy Byrne would have rushed melodramatically into the midst of the fray, and in all probability have had his face pushed completely through the back of his head, for the guys from Twelfth Street were not of the rah-rah-boy type of hoodlum — they were bad men, with an upper case B. So Billy crept stealthily along in the shadows until he was quite close to them, and behind them. On the way he had gathered up a cute little granite paving block, than which there is nothing in the world harder, not even a Twelfth Street skull. He was quite close now to one of the men — he who was wielding the officer's club to such excellent disadvantage to

the officer — and then he raised the paving block only to lower it silently and suddenly upon the back of that unsuspecting head — “and then there were two.”

Before the man's companions realized what had happened Billy had possessed himself of the fallen club and struck one of them a blinding, staggering blow across the eyes. Then number three pulled his gun and fired point-blank at Billy. The bullet tore through the mucker's left shoulder. It would have sent a more highly organized and nervously inclined man to the pavement; but Billy was neither highly organized nor nervously inclined, so that about the only immediate effect it had upon him was to make him mad — before he had been but peeved — peeved at the rank crust that had permitted these cheap-skates from south of Twelfth Street to work his territory.

Thoroughly aroused, Billy was a wonder. From a long line of burly ancestors he had inherited the physique of a prize bull. From earliest childhood he had fought, always unfairly, so that he knew all the tricks of street fighting. During the past year there had been added to Billy's natural fighting ability and instinct a knowledge of the scientific end of the sport. The result was something appalling — to the gink from Twelfth Street.

Before he knew whether his shot had killed Billy his gun had been wrenched from his hand and flung across the street; he was down on the granite with a hand as hard as the paving block scrambling his facial attractions beyond hope of recall.

By this time Patrolman Lasky had staggered to his feet, and most opportunely at that, for the man whom Billy had dazed with the club was recovering. Lasky promptly put him to sleep with the butt of the gun that he had been unable to draw when first attacked, then he turned to assist Billy. But it was not Billy who needed assistance — it was the

gentleman from Bohemia. With difficulty Lasky dragged Billy from his prey.

"Leave enough of him for the inquest," pleaded Lasky.

When the wagon arrived Billy had disappeared, but Lasky had recognized him and thereafter the two had nodded pleasantly to each other upon such occasions as they chanced to meet upon the street.

Two years elapsed before the event transpired which proved a crisis in Billy's life. During this period his existence had been much the same as before. He had collected what was coming to him from careless and less muscular citizens. He had helped to stick up a half-dozen saloons. He had robbed the night men in two elevated stations, and for a while had been upon the pay-roll of a certain union and done strong arm work in all parts of the city for twenty-five dollars a week.

By day he was a general utility man about Larry Hilmore's boxing academy, and time and time again Hilmore urged him to quit drinking and live straight, for he saw in the young giant the makings of a great heavy-weight; but Billy couldn't leave the booze alone, and so the best that he got was an occasional five spot for appearing in preliminary bouts with third- and fourth-rate heavies and has-beens; but during the three years that he had hung about Hilmore's he had acquired an enviable knowledge of the manly art of self-defense.

On the night that things really began to happen in the life of Billy Byrne that estimable gentleman was lolling in front of a saloon at the corner of Lake and Robey. The dips that congregated nightly there under the protection of the powerful politician who owned the place were commencing to assemble. Billy knew them all, and nodded to them as they passed him. He noted surprise in the faces of several as they saw him standing there. He wondered what it

was all about, and determined to ask the next man who evinced even mute wonderment at his presence what was eating him.

Then Billy saw a harness bull strolling toward him from the east. It was Lasky. When Lasky saw Billy he too opened his eyes in surprise, and when he came quite close to the mucker he whispered something to him, though he kept his eyes straight ahead as though he had not seen Billy at all.

In deference to the whispered request Billy presently strolled around the corner toward Walnut Street, but at the alley back of the saloon he turned suddenly in. A hundred yards up the alley he found Lasky in the shadow of a telephone pole.

"Wotinell are you doin' around here?" asked the patrolman. "Didn't you know that Sheehan had peached?"

Two nights before old man Schneider, goaded to desperation by the repeated raids upon his cash drawer, had shown fight when he again had been invited to elevate his hands, and the holdup men had shot him through the heart. Sheehan had been arrested on suspicion.

Billy had not been with Sheehan that night. As a matter of fact he never had trained with him, for, since the boyish battle that the two had waged, there had always been ill feeling between them; but with Lasky's words Billy knew what had happened.

"Sheehan says I done it, eh?" he questioned.

"That's what he says."

"I wasn't within a mile of Schneider's that night," protested Billy.

"The Lieut thinks different," said Lasky. "He'd be only too glad to soak you; for you've always been too slick to get nicked before. Orders is out to get you, and if I were you I'd beat it and beat it quick. I don't have to

tell you why I'm handing you this, but it's all I can do for you. Now take my advice and make yourself scarce, though you'll have to go some to make your get-away now — every man on the force has your description by this time."

Billy turned without a word and walked east in the alley toward Lincoln Street. Lasky returned to Robey Street. In Lincoln Street Billy walked north to Kinzie. Here he entered the railroad yards. An hour later he was bumping out of town toward the West on a fast freight. Three weeks later he found himself in San Francisco. He had no money, but the methods that had so often replenished his depleted exchequer at home he felt would serve the same purpose here.

Being unfamiliar with San Francisco, Billy did not know where best to work, but when by accident he stumbled upon a street where there were many saloons whose patrons were obviously seafaring men Billy was distinctly elated. What could be better for his purpose than a drunken sailor?

He entered one of the saloons and stood watching a game of cards, or thus he seemed to be occupied. As a matter of fact his eyes were constantly upon the alert, roving about the room to wherever a man was in the act of paying for a round of drinks that a fat wallet might be located.

Presently one that filled him with longing rewarded his careful watch. The man was sitting at a table a short distance from Billy. Two other men were with him. As he paid the waiter from a well-filled pocketbook he looked up to meet Billy's eyes upon him.

With a drunken smile he beckoned to the mucker to join them. Billy felt that Fate was overkind to him, and he lost no time in heeding her call. A moment later he was sitting at the table with the three sailors, and had ordered a drop of red-eye.

The stranger was very lavish in his entertainment. He

scarcely waited for Billy to drain one glass before he ordered another, and once after Billy had left the table for a moment he found a fresh drink awaiting him when he returned — his host had already poured it for him.

It was this last drink that did the business.

CHAPTER II

SHANGHAIED

WHEN Billy opened his eyes again he could not recall, for the instant, very much of his recent past. At last he remembered with painful regret the drunken sailor it had been his intention to roll. He felt deeply chagrined that his rightful prey should have escaped him. He couldn't understand how it had happened.

"This Frisco booze must be something fierce," thought Billy.

His head ached frightfully and he was very sick. So sick that the room in which he lay seemed to be rising and falling in a horribly realistic manner. Every time it dropped it brought Billy's stomach nearly to his mouth.

Billy shut his eyes. Still the awful sensation. Billy groaned. He never had been so sick in all his life before, and, my, how his poor head did hurt. Finding that it only seemed to make matters worse when he closed his eyes Billy opened them again.

He looked about the room in which he lay. He found it a stuffy hole filled with bunks in tiers three deep around the sides. In the center of the room was a table. Above the table a lamp hung suspended from one of the wooden beams of the ceiling.

The lamp arrested Billy's attention. It was swinging back and forth rather violently. This could not be a hallucination. The room might seem to be rising and falling, but that lamp could not seem to be swinging around in any such manner if it were not really and truly swinging. He

couldn't account for it. Again he shut his eyes for a moment. When he opened them to look again at the lamp he found it still swung as before.

Cautiously he slid from his bunk to the floor. It was with difficulty that he kept his feet. Still that might be but the effects of the liquor. At last he reached the table to which he clung for support while he extended one hand toward the lamp.

There was no longer any doubt! The lamp was beating back and forth like the clapper of a great bell. Where was he? Billy sought a window. He found some little round, glass-covered holes near the low ceiling at one side of the room. It was only at the greatest risk to life and limb that he managed to crawl on all fours to one of them.

As he straightened up and glanced through he was appalled at the sight that met his eyes. As far as he could see there was naught but a tumbling waste of water. And then the truth of what had happened to him broke upon his understanding.

"An' I was goin' to roll that guy!" he muttered in helpless bewilderment. "I was a-goin' to roll him, and now look here wot he has done to me!"

At that moment a light appeared above as the hatch was raised, and Billy saw the feet and legs of a large man descending the ladder from above. When the newcomer reached the floor and turned to look about his eyes met Billy's, and Billy saw that it was his host of the previous evening.

"Well, my hearty, how goes it?" asked the stranger.

"You pulled it off pretty slick," said Billy.

"What do you mean?" asked the other with a frown.

"Come off," said Billy; "you know what I mean."

"Look here," replied the other coldly. "Don't you forget that I'm mate of this ship, an' that you want to speak respectful to me if you ain't lookin' for trouble. My name's

Mr. Ward, an' when you speak to me say Sir. Understand?"

Billy scratched his head, and blinked his eyes. He never before had been spoken to in any such fashion — at least not since he had put on the avoirdupois of manhood. His head ached horribly and he was sick to his stomach — frightfully sick. His mind was more upon his physical suffering than upon what the mate was saying, so that quite a perceptible interval of time elapsed before the true dimensions of the affront to his dignity commenced to percolate into the befogged and pain-racked convolutions of his brain.

The mate thought that his bluster had bluffed the new hand. That was what he had come below to accomplish. Experience had taught him that an early lesson in discipline and subordination saved unpleasant encounters in the future. He also had learned that there is no better time to put a bluff of this nature across than when the victim is suffering from the after-effects of whiskey and a drug — mentality, vitality, and courage are then at their lowest ebb. A brave man often is reduced to the pitiful condition of a yellow dog when nausea sits astride his stomach.

But the mate was not acquainted with Billy Byrne of Kelly's gang. Billy's brain was befuddled, so that it took some time for an idea to wriggle its way through, but his courage was all there, and all to the good. Billy was a mucker, a hoodlum, a gangster, a thug, a tough. When he fought, his methods would have brought a flush of shame to the face of His Satanic Majesty. He had hit oftener from behind than from before. He had always taken every advantage of size and weight and numbers that he could call to his assistance. He was an insulter of girls and women. He was a bar-room brawler, and a saloon-corner loafer. He was all that was dirty, and mean, and contemptible, and cowardly in the eyes of a brave man, and yet, notwithstanding

all this, Billy Byrne was no coward. He was what he was because of training and environment. He knew no other methods; no other code. Whatever the meager ethics of his kind he would have lived up to them to the death. He never had squealed on a pal and he never had left a wounded friend to fall into the hands of the enemy — the police.

Nor had he ever let a man speak to him as the mate had spoken, and get away with it, and so, while he did not act as quickly as would have been his wont had his brain been clear, he did act; but the interval of time had led the mate into an erroneous conception of its cause, and into a further rash show of authority, and had thrown him off his guard as well.

“What you need,” said the mate, advancing toward Billy, “is a bash on the beezzer. It’ll help you remember that you ain’t nothin’ but a dirty damn landlubber, an’ when your betters come around you’ll——”

But what Billy would have done in the presence of his betters remained stillborn in the mate’s imagination in the face of what Billy really did do to his better as that worthy swung a sudden, vicious blow at the mucker’s face.

Billy Byrne had not been scrapping with third- and fourth-rate heavies, and sparring with real, live ones for nothing. The mate’s fist whistled through empty air; the blear-eyed hunk of clay that had seemed such easy prey to him was metamorphosed on the instant into an alert, catlike bundle of steel sinews, and Billy Byrne swung that awful right with the pile-driver weight, that even The Big Smoke himself had acknowledged respect for, straight to the short ribs of his antagonist.

With a screech of surprise and pain the mate crumpled in the far corner of the forecabin, rammed halfway beneath the bunk by the force of the terrific blow. Like a tiger Billy Byrne was after him, and dragging the man out into the center of the floor space he beat and mauled him until hi

victim's blood-curdling shrieks echoed through the ship from stem to stern.

When the captain, followed by a half-dozen seamen rushed down the companionway, he found Billy sitting astride the prostrate form of the mate. His great fingers circled the man's throat, and with mighty blows he was dashing the fellow's head against the hard floor. Another moment and murder would have been complete.

"Avast there!" cried the captain, and as though to punctuate his remark he swung the heavy stick he usually carried full upon the back of Billy's head. It was that blow that saved the mate's life, for when Billy came to he found himself in a dark and smelly hole, chained and padlocked to a heavy stanchion.

They kept Billy there for a week; but every day the captain visited him in an attempt to show him the error of his way. The medium used by the skipper for impressing his ideas of discipline upon Billy was a large, hard stick. At the end of the week it was necessary to carry Billy above to keep the rats from devouring him, for the continued beatings and starvation had reduced him to little more than an unconscious mass of raw and bleeding meat.

"There," remarked the skipper, as he viewed his work by the light of day, "I guess that fellow'll know his place next time an officer an' a gentleman speaks to him."

That Billy survived is one of the hitherto unrecorded miracles of the power of matter over mind. A man of intellect, of imagination, a being of nerves, would have succumbed to the shock alone; but Billy was not as these. He simply lay still and thoughtless, except for half-formed ideas of revenge, until Nature, unaided, built up what the captain had so ruthlessly torn down.

Ten days after they brought him up from the hold Billy was limping about the deck of the *Halfmoon* doing light

manual labor. From the other sailors aboard he learned that he was not the only member of the crew who had been shanghaied. Aside from a half-dozen reckless men from the criminal classes who had signed voluntarily, either because they could not get a berth upon a decent ship, or desired to flit as quietly from the law zone of the United States as possible, not a man was there who had been signed regularly.

They were as tough and vicious a lot as Fate ever had foregathered in one fore-castle, and with them Billy Byrne felt perfectly at home. His early threats of awful vengeance to be wreaked upon the mate and skipper had subsided with the rough but sensible advice of his messmates. The mate, for his part, gave no indication of harboring the assault that Billy had made upon him other than to assign the most dangerous or disagreeable duties of the ship to the mucker whenever it was possible to do so; but the result of this was to hasten Billy's nautical education, and keep him in excellent physical trim.

All traces of alcohol had long since vanished from the young man's system. His face showed the effects of his enforced abstemiousness in a marked degree. The red, puffy, blotchy complexion had given way to a clear, tanned skin, bright eyes supplanted the bleary, bloodshot things that had given the bestial expression to his face in the past. His features, always regular and strong, had taken on a peculiarly refined dignity from the salt air, the clean life, and the dangerous occupation of the deep-sea sailor, that would have put Kelly's gang to a pinch to have recognized their erstwhile crony had he suddenly appeared in their midst in the alley back of the feed-store on Grand Avenue.

With the new life Billy found himself taking on a new character. He surprised himself singing at his work — he whose whole life up to now had been devoted to dodging honest labor — whose motto had been: The world owes me

a living, and it's up to me to collect it. Also, he was surprised to discover that he liked to work, that he took keen pride in striving to outdo the men who worked with him, and this spirit, despite the suspicion which the captain entertained of Billy since the episode of the forecastle, went far to making his life more endurable on board the *Halfmoon*, for workers such as the mucker developed into are not to be sneezed at, and though he had little idea of subordination it was worth putting up with something to keep him in condition to work. It was this line of reasoning that saved Billy's skull on one or two occasions when his impudence had been sufficient to have provoked the skipper to a personal assault upon him under ordinary conditions; and Mr. Ward, having tasted of Billy's medicine once, had no craving for another encounter with him that would entail personal conflict.

The entire crew was made up of ruffians and unhung murderers, but Skipper Simms had had little experience with seamen of any other ilk, so he handled them roughshod, using his horny fist, and the short, heavy stick that he habitually carried, in lieu of argument; but with the exception of Billy the men all had served before the mast in the past, so that ship's discipline was to some extent ingrained in them all.

Enjoying his work, the life was not an unpleasant one for the mucker. The men of the forecastle were of the kind he had always known — there was no honor among them, no virtue, no kindness, no decency. With them Billy was at home — he scarcely missed the old gang. He made his friends among them, and his enemies. He picked quarrels, as had been his way since childhood. His science and his great strength, together with his endless stock of underhand tricks brought him out of each encounter with fresh laurels. Presently he found it difficult to pick a fight — his mess-mates had had enough of him. They left him severely alone.

These, oftentimes bloody, battles engendered no deep-seated hatred in the hearts of the defeated. They were part of the day's work and play of the half-brutes that Skipp Simms had gathered together. There was only one man aboard whom Billy really hated. That was the passenger and Billy hated him, not because of anything that the man had said or done to Billy, for he had never even so much as spoken to the mucker, but because of the fine clothes and superior air which marked him plainly to Billy as one of the loathed element of society—a gentleman.

Billy hated everything that was respectable. He hated the smug, self-satisfied merchants of Grand Avenue. He had writhed in torture at sight of every shiny, purring automobile that had ever passed him with its load of well-groomed men and women. A clean, stiff collar was to Billy as a red rag to a bull. Cleanliness, success, opulence, decency, spelled but one thing to Billy—physical weakness, and he hated physical weakness. His idea of indicating strength and manliness lay in displaying as much of brutality and uncouthness as possible. To assist a woman over a mud hole would have seemed to Billy an acknowledgment of pusillanimity—to stick out his foot and trip her so that she sprawled full length in it, the hall-mark of bluff manliness. And so he hated, with all the strength of a storm nature, the immaculate, courteous, well-bred man who paced the deck each day smoking a fragrant cigar after his meal.

Inwardly he wondered what the dude was doing on board such a vessel as the *Halfmoon*, and marveled that so was a thing dared venture among real men. Billy's contempt caused him to notice the passenger more than he would have been ready to admit. He saw that the man's face was handsome, but there was an unpleasant shiftiness to his brown eyes; and then, entirely outside of his former reasons for hating him, Billy came to loathe him intuitively, as one would

was not to be trusted. Finally his dislike for the man became an obsession. He haunted, when discipline permitted, that part of the vessel where he would be most likely to encounter the object of his wrath, hoping, always hoping, that the "dude" would give him some slight pretext for "pushing in his mush," as Billy would so picturesquely have worded it.

He was loitering about the deck for this purpose one evening when he overheard part of a low-voiced conversation between the object of his wrath and Skipper Simms — just enough to set him to wondering what was doing, and to show him that whatever it might be it was crooked and that the immaculate passenger and Skipper Simms were both "in on it."

He questioned "Bony" Sawyer, and "Red" Sanders, but neither had nearly as much information as Billy himself, and so the *Halfmoon* came to Honolulu and lay at anchor some hundred yards from a stanch, trim, white yacht, and none new, other than the *Halfmoon's* officers and her single passenger, the real mission of the harmless-looking little brigantine.

CHAPTER III

THE CONSPIRACY

NO SHORE leave was granted the crew of the *Half-moon* while the vessel lay off Honolulu, and deep and ominous were the grumblings of the men. Only First Officer Ward and the second mate went ashore. Skipper Simms kept the men busy painting and holystoning as a vent for their pent emotions.

Billy Byrne noticed that the passenger had abandoned his daylight strolls on deck. In fact he never once left his cabin while the *Halfmoon* lay at anchor until darkness had fallen; then he would come on deck, often standing for an hour at a time with eyes fastened steadily upon the brave little yacht from the canopied upper deck of which gay laughter and soft music came floating across the still water.

When Mr. Ward and the second mate came to shore a strange thing happened. They entered a third-rate hotel near the water front, engaged a room for a week, paid in advance, were in their room for half an hour and emerged clothed in civilian raiment.

Then they hastened to another hostelry — a first-class one this time, and the second mate walked ahead in frock coat and silk hat while Mr. Ward trailed behind in a neat, blue serge sack suit, carrying both bags.

At the second hotel the second mate registered as Henri Theriere, Count de Cadenet, and servant, France. His first act thereafter was to hand a note to the clerk asking that it be dispatched immediately. The note was addressed to Anthony Harding, Esq., On Board Yacht *Lotus*.

Count de Cadenet and his servant repaired immediately to the count's rooms, there to await an answer to the note. Henri Theriere, the second officer of the *Halfmoon*, in frock coat and silk hat looked every inch a nobleman and a gentleman. What his past had been only he knew, but his polished manners, his knowledge of navigation and seamanship, and his leaning toward the ways of the martinet in his dealings with the men beneath him had led Skipper Simms to assume that he had once held a commission in the French Navy, from which he doubtless had been kicked—in disgrace.

The man was cold, cruel, of a moody disposition, and quick to anger. He had been signed as second officer for this cruise through the intervention of Divine and Clinker. He had sailed with Simms before, but the skipper had found him too hard a customer to deal with, and had been on the point of seeking another second when Divine and Clinker discovered him on board the *Halfmoon* and after ten minutes' conversation with him found that he fitted so perfectly into their scheme of action that they would not hear of Simms releasing him.

Ward had little use for the Frenchman, whose haughty manner and condescending airs grated on the sensibilities of the uncouth and boorish first officer. The duty which necessitated him acting in the capacity of Theriere's servant was about as distasteful to him as anything could be, and only served to add to his hatred for the inferior, who, in the bottom of his heart, he knew to be in every way, except upon the roster of the *Halfmoon*, his superior; but money can work wonders, and Divine's promise that the officers and crew of the *Halfmoon* would have a cool million United States dollars to divide among them in case of the success of the venture had quite effectually overcome any dislike which Mr. Ward had felt for this particular phase of his duty.

The two officers sat in silence in their room at the hotel

waiting an answer to the note they had dispatched to Anthony Harding, Esq. The parts they were to act had been carefully rehearsed on board the *Halfmoon* many times. Each was occupied with his own thoughts, and as they had nothing in common outside the present rascality that had brought them together, and as that subject was one not well to discuss more than necessary, there seemed no call for conversation.

On board the yacht in the harbor preparations were being made to land a small party that contemplated a motor trip up the Nuuanu Valley when a small boat drew alongside, and a messenger from the hotel handed a sealed note to one of the sailors.

From the deck of the *Halfmoon* Skipper Simms witnessed the transaction, smiling inwardly. Billy Byrne also saw it but it meant nothing to him. He had been lolling upon the deck of the brigantine glaring at the yacht *Lotus*, hating her and the gay, well-dressed men and women he could see laughing and chatting upon her deck. They represented to him the concentrated essence of all that was pusillanimous disgusting, loathsome in that other world that was as far separated from him as though he had been a grubworm in the manure pile back of Brady's livery stable.

He saw the note handed by the sailor to a gray-haired smooth-faced man — a large, sleek, well-groomed man. Billy could imagine the white hands and polished nails of him. The thought was nauseating.

The man who took and opened the note was Anthony Harding, Esq. He read it, and then passed it to a young woman who stood near-by talking with other young people.

"Here, Barbara," he said, "is something of more interest to you than to me. If you wish I'll call upon him and invite him to dinner tonight."

The girl was reading the note.

Anthony Harding, Esq.,
On Board Yacht *Lotus*,
Honolulu.

My dear Mr. Harding:

This will introduce a very dear friend of mine, Count de Cadenet, who expects to be in Honolulu about the time that you are there. The count is traveling for pleasure, and as he is entirely unacquainted upon the islands any courtesies which you may show him will be greatly appreciated.

Cordially,

L. CORTWRITE DIVINE.

The girl smiled as she finished perusing the note.

"Larry is always picking up titles and making dear friends of them," she laughed. "I wonder where he found this one."

"Or where this one found him," suggested Mr. Harding. "Well, I suppose that the least we can do is to have him aboard for dinner. We'll be leaving tomorrow, so there won't be much entertaining we can do."

"Let's pick him up on our way through town now," suggested Barbara Harding, "and take him with us for the day. That will be settling our debt to friendship, and dinner tonight can depend upon what sort of person we find the count to be."

"As you will," replied her father, and so it came about that two big touring cars drew up before the Count de Cadenet's hotel half an hour later, and Anthony Harding, Esq., entered and sent up his card.

The "count" came down in person to greet his caller. Harding saw at a glance that the man was a gentleman, and when he had introduced him to the other members of the party it was evident that they appraised him quite as had their host. Barbara Harding seemed particularly taken with the Count de Cadenet, insisting that he join those who occupied her car, and so it was that the second officer of the

Halfmoon rode out of Honolulu in pleasant conversation with the object of his visit to the island.

Barbara Harding found De Cadenet an interesting man. There was no corner of the globe however remote with which he was not to some degree familiar. He was well read, and possessed the ability to discuss what he had read intelligently and entertainingly. There was no evidence of moodiness in him now. He was the personification of affability, for was he not monopolizing the society of a very beautiful, and very wealthy young lady?

The day's outing had two significant results. It put into the head of the second mate of the *Halfmoon* that which would have caused his skipper and the retiring Mr. Divine acute mental perturbation could they have guessed it; and it put De Cadenet into possession of information which necessitated his refusing the urgent invitation to dine upon the yacht, *Lotus*, that evening — the information that the party would sail the following morning en route to Manila.

"I cannot tell you," he said to Mr. Harding, "how much I regret the circumstance that must rob me of the pleasure of accepting your invitation. Only absolute necessity, I assure you, could prevent me being with you as long as possible," and though he spoke to the girl's father he looked directly into the eyes of Barbara Harding.

A young woman of less experience might have given some outward indication of the effect of this speech upon her, but whether she was pleased or otherwise the Count de Cadenet could not guess, for she merely voiced the smiling regrets that courtesy demanded.

They left De Cadenet at his hotel, and as he bid them farewell the man turned to Barbara Harding with a low aside.

"I shall see you again, Miss Harding," he said, "very, very soon."

She could not guess what was in his mind as he voiced this

rather, under the circumstances, unusual statement. Could she have, the girl would have been terror-stricken; but she saw that in his eyes which she could translate, and she wondered many times that evening whether she were pleased or angry with the message it conveyed.

The moment De Cadenet entered the hotel he hurried to the room where the impatient Mr. Ward awaited him.

“Quick!” he cried. “We must bundle out of here post-haste. They sail tomorrow morning. Your duties as valet have been light and short-lived; but I can give you an excellent recommendation should you desire to take service with another gentleman.”

“That’ll be about all of that, Mr. Theriere,” snapped the first officer, coldly. “I did not embark upon this theatrical enterprise for amusement—I see nothing funny in it, and I wish you to remember that I am still your superior officer.”

Theriere shrugged. Ward did not chance to catch the ugly look in his companion’s eye. Together they gathered up their belongings, descended to the office, paid their bill, and a few moments later were changing back to their sea clothes in the little hotel where they first had engaged accommodations. Half an hour later they stepped to the deck of the *Halfmoon*.

Billy Byrne saw them from where he worked in the vicinity of the cabin. When they were not looking he scowled maliciously at them. They were the personal representatives of authority, and Billy hated authority in whatever guise it might be visited upon him. He hated law and order and discipline.

“I’d like to meet one of dem guys on Green Street some night,” he thought.

He saw them enter the captain’s cabin with the skipper, and then he saw Mr. Divine join them. Billy noted the haste displayed by the four and it set him to wondering.

The scrap of conversation between Divine and Simms that he had overheard returned to him. He wanted to hear more, and as Billy was not handicapped by any overly refined notions of the ethics which frown upon eavesdropping he lost no time in transferring the scene of his labors to a point sufficiently close to one of the cabin ports to permit him to note what took place within.

What the mucker heard of that conversation made him prick up his ears. He saw that something after his own heart was doing — something crooked, and he wondered that so pusillanimous a thing as Divine could have a hand in it. It almost changed his estimate of the passenger of the *Halfmoon*.

The meeting broke up so suddenly that Billy had to drop to his knees to escape the observation of those within the cabin. As it was, Theriere, who had started to leave a second before the others, caught a fleeting glimpse of a face that quickly had been withdrawn from the cabin skylight as though its owner were fearful of detection.

Without a word to his companions the Frenchman left the cabin, but once outside he bounded up the companionway to the deck with the speed of a squirrel. Nor was he an instant too soon, for as he emerged from below he saw the figure of a man disappearing forward.

"Hey there, you!" he cried. "Come back here."

The mucker turned, a sulky scowl upon his lowering countenance, and the second officer saw that it was the fellow who had given Ward such a trimming the first day out.

"Oh, it's you is it, Byrne?" he said in a not unpleasant tone. "Come to my quarters a moment, I want to speak with you," and so saying he wheeled about and retraced his way below, the seaman at his heels.

"My man," said Theriere, once the two were behind the closed door of the officer's cabin, "I needn't ask how much

you overheard of the conversation in the captain's cabin. If you hadn't overheard a great deal more than you should you wouldn't have been so keen to escape detection just now. What I wanted to say to you is this. Keep a close tongue in your head and stick by me in what's going to happen in the next few days. This bunch," he jerked his thumb in the direction of the captain's cabin, "are fixing their necks for halters, an' I for one don't intend to poke my head through any noose of another man's making. There's more in this thing if its handled right, and handled without too many men in on the whack-up than we can get out of it if that man Divine has to be counted in. I've a plan of my own, an' it won't take but three or four of us to put it across."

"You don't like Ward," he continued, "and you may be almighty sure that Mr. Ward ain't losing any sleep nights over love of you. If you stick to that bunch Ward will do you out of your share as sure as you are a foot high, an' the chances are that he'll do you out of a whole lot more besides—as a matter of fact, Byrne, you're a mighty poor life insurance risk right now, with a life expectancy that's pretty near minus as long as Bender Ward is on the same ship with you. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Aw," said Billy Byrne, "I ain't afraid o' that stiff. Let him make any funny crack at me an' I'll cave in a handful of slats for him—the piker."

"That's all right too, Byrne," said Theriere. "Of course you can do it if anybody can, provided you get the chance; but Ward isn't the man to give you any chance. There may be shooting necessary within the next day or so, and there's nothing to prevent Ward letting you have it in the back, purely by accident; and if he don't do it then there'll be all kinds of opportunities for it before any of us ever see a white man's port again. He'll get you, Byrne; he's that kind."

"Now, with my proposition you'll be shut of Ward, Skipper Simms, and Divine. There'll be more money in it for you, an' you won't have to go around expecting a bullet in the small of your back every minute. What do you say? Are you game, or shall I have to go back to Skipper Simms and Ward and tell them that I caught you eavesdropping?"

"Oh, I'm game," said Billy Byrne, "if you'll promise me a square deal on the divvy."

The Frenchman extended his hand.

"Let's shake on it," he said.

Billy took the proffered palm in his.

"That's a go," he said; "but hadn't you better wise me to wot's doin'?"

"Not now," said Theriere, "someone might overhear just as you did. Wait a bit until I have a better opportunity, and I'll tell you all there is to know. In the meantime think over who'd be the best men to let into this with us—we'll need three or four more besides ourselves. Now go on deck about your duties as though nothing had happened, and if I'm a bit rougher than usual with you you'll understand that it's to avert any possible suspicion later."

"I'm next," said Billy Byrne.

CHAPTER IV

PIRACY

BY DUSK the trim little brigantine was scudding away toward the west before a wind that could not have suited her better had it been made to order at the special behest of the devil himself to speed his minions upon their devil's work.

All hands were in the best of humor. The crew had forgotten their recent rancor at not having been permitted shore leave at Honolulu in the expectancy of adventure in the near future, for there was that in the atmosphere of the *Halfmoon* which proclaimed louder than words the proximity of excitement, and the goal toward which they had been sailing since they left San Francisco.

Skipper Simms and Divine were elated at the luck which had brought them to Honolulu in the nick of time, and at the success of Theriere's mission at that port. They had figured upon a week at least there before the second officer of the *Halfmoon* could ingratiate himself sufficiently into the good-will of the Hardings to learn their plans, and now they were congratulating themselves upon their acumen in selecting so fit an agent as the Frenchman for the work he had handled so expeditiously and so well.

Ward was pleased that he had not been forced to prolong the galling masquerade of valet to his inferior officer. F was hopeful, too, that coming events would bring to the fore an opportunity to satisfy the vengeance he had inwardly sworn against the sailor who had so roughly manhandled

him a few weeks past — Theriere had not been in error in his estimate of his fellow-officer.

Billy Byrne, the arduous labor of making sail over for the time, was devoting his energies to the task of piecing out from what Theriere had told him and what he had overheard outside the skipper's cabin some sort of explanation of the work ahead.

As he pondered Theriere's proposition he saw the wisdom of it. It would give those interested a larger amount of the booty for their share. Another feature of it was that it was underhanded and that appealed strongly to the mucker. Now, if he could but devise some scheme for double-crossing Theriere the pleasure and profit of the adventure would be tripled.

It was this proposition that was occupying his attention when he caught sight of "Bony" Sawyer and "Red" Sanders emerging from the forecastle. Billy Byrne hailed them.

When the mucker had explained the possibilities of profit that were to be had by entering the conspiracy aimed at Simms and Ward the two seamen were enthusiastically for it.

"Bony" Sawyer suggested that the black cook, Blanco, was about the only other member of the crew upon whom they could depend, and at Byrne's request "Bony" promised to enlist the cooperation of the giant Ethiopian.

From early morning of the second day out of Honolulu keen eyes scanned the eastern horizon through powerful glasses, until about two bells of the afternoon watch a slight smudge became visible about two points north of east. Immediately the course of the *Halfmoon* was altered so that he bore almost directly north by west in an effort to come safely into the course of the steamer which was seen rising boldly above the horizon.

The new course of the brigantine was held as long as it seemed reasonably safe without danger of being sighted

under full sail by the oncoming vessel, then her head was brought into the wind, and one by one her sails were lowered and furled, as the keen eyes of Second Officer Theriere announced that there was no question but that the white hull in the distance was that of the steam pleasure yacht *Lotus*.

Upon the deck of the unsuspecting vessel a merry party laughed and chatted in happy ignorance of the plotters in their path. It was nearly half an hour after the *Halfmoon* had come to rest, drifting idly under bare poles, that the lookout upon the *Lotus* sighted her.

"Sailin' vessel lyin' to, west half south," he shouted, "flyin' distress signals."

In an instant guests and crew had hurried to points of vantage where they might obtain unobstructed view of the stranger, and take advantage of this break in the monotony of a long sea voyage.

Anthony Harding was on the bridge with the captain, and both men had leveled their glasses upon the distant ship.

"Can you make her out?" asked the owner.

"She's a brigantine," replied the officer, "and all that I can make out from here would indicate that everything was shipshape about her. Her canvas is neatly furled, and she is evidently well manned, for I can see a number of figures above deck apparently engaged in watching us. I'll alter our course and speak to her — we'll see what's wrong, and give her a hand if we can."

"That's right," replied Harding; "do anything you can for them."

A moment later he joined his daughter and their guests to report the meager information he had.

"How exciting," exclaimed Barbara Harding. "Of course it's not a real shipwreck, but maybe it's the next thing to it. The poor souls may have been drifting about here in the center of the Pacific without food or water for

goodness knows how many weeks, and now just think how they must be lifting their voices in thanks to God for his infinite mercy in guiding us to them."

"If they've been drifting for any considerable number of weeks without food or water," hazarded Billy Mallory, "about the only things they'll need'll be what we didn't have the foresight to bring along—an undertaker and a preacher."

"Don't be horrid, Billy," returned Miss Harding. "You know perfectly well that I didn't mean weeks—I meant days; and anyway they'll be grateful to us for what we can do for them. I can scarcely wait to hear their story."

Billy Mallory was inspecting the stranger through Mr. Harding's glass. Suddenly he gave an exclamation of dismay.

"By George!" he cried. "It is serious after all. That ship's afire. Look, Mr. Harding," and he passed the glass over to his host.

And sure enough, as the owner of the *Lotus* found the brigantine again in the center of his lens he saw a thin column of black smoke rising amidships; but what he did not see was Mr. Ward upon the opposite side of the *Half-moon's* cabin superintending the burning by the black cook of a bundle of oily rags in an iron boiler.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Mr. Harding. "This is terrible. The poor devils are panic-stricken. Look at 'em making for the boats!" and with that he dashed back to the bridge to confer with his captain.

"Yes," said that officer, "I noticed the smoke about the same time you did—funny it wasn't apparent before. I've already signaled full speed ahead, and I've instructed Mr. Foster to have the boats in readiness to lower away if we find that they're short of boats on the brigantine.

"What I can't understand," he added after a moment's

silence, "is why they didn't show any signs of excitement about that fire until we came within easy sight of them — it looks funny."

"Well, we'll know in a few minutes more," returned Mr. Harding. "The chances are that the fire is just a recent addition to their predicament, whatever it may be, and that they have only just discovered it themselves."

"Then it can't have gained enough headway," insisted the captain, "to cause them any such immediate terror as would be indicated by the haste with which the whole ship's crew is tumbling into those boats; but as you say, sir, we'll have their story out of them in a few minutes now, so it's idle speculating beforehand."

The officers and men of the *Halfmoon*, in so far as those on board the *Lotus* could guess, had all entered the boats at last, and were pulling frantically away from their own ship toward the rapidly nearing yacht; but what they did not guess and could not know was that Mr. Divine paced nervously to and fro in his cabin, while Second Officer Theriere tended the smoking rags that Ward and Blanco had resigned to him that they might take their places in the boats.

Theriere had been greatly disgusted with the turn events had taken for he had determined upon a line of action that he felt sure would prove highly remunerative to himself. It had been nothing less than a bold resolve to call Blanco, Byrne, "Bony," and "Red" to his side the moment Simms and Ward revealed the true purpose of their ruse to those on board the *Lotus*, and with his henchmen take sides with the men of the yacht against his former companions.

As he had explained it to Billy Byrne the idea was to permit Mr. Harding to believe that Theriere and his companions had been duped by Skipper Simms — that they had had no idea of the work that they were to be called upon to perform until the last moment and that then they had done

the only thing they could do to protect the passengers and crew of the *Lotus*.

"And then," Theriere had concluded, "when they think we are a band of heroes, and the best friends they have on earth we'll just naturally be in a position to grab the whole lot of them, and collect ransoms on ten or fifteen instead of just one."

"Bully!" exclaimed the mucker. "You sure got some bean, mate."

As a matter of fact Theriere had had no intention of carrying the matter as far as he had intimated to Billy except as a last resort. He had been mightily smitten by the face and fortune of Barbara Harding and had seen in the trend of events a possible opportunity of so deeply obligating her father and herself that when he paid court to her she might fall a willing victim to his wiles. In this case he would be obliged to risk nothing, and could make away with his accomplices by explaining to Mr. Harding that he had been compelled to concoct this other scheme to obtain their assistance against Simms and Ward; then they could throw the three into irons and all would be lovely; but now that fool Ward had upset the whole thing by hitting upon this asinine fire hoax as an excuse for boarding the *Lotus* in force, and had further dampened Theriere's pet scheme by suggesting to Skipper Simms the danger of Theriere being recognized as they were boarding the *Lotus* and bringing suspicion upon them all immediately.

They all knew that a pleasure yacht like the *Lotus* was well supplied with small arms, and that at the first intimation of danger there would be plenty of men aboard to repel assault, and, in all probability, with entire success.

That there were excellent grounds for Theriere's belief that he could win Barbara Harding's hand with such a flying start as his daring plan would have assured him may not be

questioned, for the man was cultivated, polished and, in a sinister way, good-looking. The title that he had borne upon the occasion of his visit to the yacht, was, all unknown to his accomplices, his by right of birth, so that there was nothing other than a long-dead scandal in the French Navy that might have proved a bar to an alliance such as he dreamed of. And now to be thwarted at the last moment! It was unendurable. That pig of a Ward had sealed his own death warrant, of that Theriere was convinced.

The boats were now quite close to the yacht, which had slowed down almost to a dead stop. In answer to the query of the *Lotus'* captain Skipper Simms was explaining their trouble.

"I'm Captain Jones," he shouted, "of the brigantine *Clarinda*, Frisco to Yokohama with dynamite. We disabled our rudder yesterday, an' this afternoon fire started in the hold. It's makin' headway fast now, an'll reach the dynamite most any time. You'd better take us aboard, an' get away from here as quick as you can. 'Tain't safe nowhere within five hun'erd fathom of her."

"You'd better make haste, Captain, hadn't you?" suggested Mr. Harding.

"I don't like the looks of things, sir," replied that officer. "She ain't flyin' any dynamite flag, an' if she was an' had a hold full there wouldn't be any particular danger to us, an' anyone that has ever shipped dynamite would know it, or ought to. It's not fire that detonates dynamite, it's concussion. No sir, Mr. Harding, there's something queer here—I don't like the looks of it. Why just take a good look at the faces of those men. Did you ever see such an ugly-looking pack of unhung murderers in your life, sir?"

"I must admit that they're not an overly prepossessing crowd, Norris;" replied Mr. Harding. "But it's not always either fair or safe to judge strangers entirely by appear-

ances. I'm afraid that there's nothing else for it in the name of common humanity than to take them aboard, Norris. I'm sure your fears are entirely groundless."

"Then it's your orders, sir, to take them aboard?" asked Captain Norris.

"Yes, Captain, I think you'd better," said Mr. Harding.

"Very good, sir," replied the officer, turning to give the necessary commands.

The officers and men of the *Halfmoon* swarmed up the sides of the *Lotus*, dark-visaged, fierce, and forbidding.

"Reminds me of a boarding party of pirates," remarked Billy Mallory, as he watched Blanco, the last to throw a leg over the rail, reach the deck.

"They're not very pretty, are they?" murmured Barbara Harding, instinctively shrinking closer to her companion.

"'Pretty' scarcely describes them, Barbara," said Billy; "and do you know that somehow I am having difficulty in imaging them on their knees giving up thanks to the Lord for their rescue — that was your recent idea of 'em you will recall."

"If you have purposely set yourself the task of being more than ordinarily disagreeable today, Billy," said Barbara sweetly, "I'm sure it will please you to know that you are succeeding."

"I'm glad I'm successful at something then," laughed the man. "I've certainly been unsuccessful enough in another matter."

"What, for example?" asked Barbara, innocently.

"Why in trying to make myself so agreeable heretofore that you'd finally consent to say 'yes' for a change."

"Now you are going to make it all the worse by being stupid," cried the girl petulantly. "Why can't you be nice, as you used to be before you got this silly notion into your head?"

"I don't think it's a silly notion to be heels over head in love with the sweetest girl on earth," cried Billy.

"Hush! Someone will hear you."

"I don't care if they do. I'd like to advertise it to the whole world. I'm proud of the fact that I love you; and you don't care enough about it to realize how really hard I'm hit — why I'd die for you, Barbara, and welcome the chance; why — My God! What's that?"

"O Billy! What are those men doing?" cried the girl. "They're shooting. They're shooting at papa! Quick, Billy! Do something. For heaven's sake do something."

On the deck below them the "rescued" crew of the "*Clarinda*" had surrounded Mr. Harding, Captain Norris, and most of the crew of the *Lotus*, flashing quick-drawn revolvers from beneath shirts and coats, and firing at two of the yacht's men who showed fight.

"Keep quiet," commanded Skipper Simms, "an' there won't none of you get hurted."

"What do you want of us?" cried Mr. Harding. "If it's money take what you can find aboard us, and go on your way. No one will hinder you."

Skipper Simms paid no attention to him. His eyes swept aloft to the upper deck. There he saw a wide-eyed girl and a man looking down upon them. He wondered if she was the one they sought. There were other women aboard. He could see them, huddled frightened behind Harding and Norris. Some of them were young and beautiful; but there was something about the girl above him that assured him she could be none other than Barbara Harding. To discover the truth Simms resorted to a ruse, for he knew that were he to ask Harding outright if the girl were his daughter the chances were more than even that the old man would suspect something of the nature of their visit and deny her identity.

“Who is that woman you have on board here?” he cried in an accusing tone of voice. “That’s what we’re a-here to find out.”

“Why she’s my daughter, man!” blurted Harding. “Who did you ——”

“Thanks,” said Skipper Simms, with a self-satisfied grin. “That’s what I wanted to be sure of. Hey, you, Byrne! You’re nearest the companionway — fetch the girl.”

At the command the mucker turned and leaped up the stairway to the upper deck. Billy Mallory had overheard the conversation below and Simms’ command to Byrne. Disengaging himself from Barbara Harding who in her terror had clutched his arm, he ran forward to the head of the stairway.

The men of the *Lotus* looked on in mute and helpless rage. All were covered by the guns of the boarding party — the still forms of two of their companions bearing eloquent witness to the slenderness of provocation necessary to tighten the trigger fingers of the beasts standing guard over them.

Billy Byrne never hesitated in his rush for the upper deck. The sight of the man awaiting him above but whetted his appetite for battle. The trim flannels, the white shoes, the natty cap, were to the mucker as sufficient cause for justifiable homicide as is an orange ribbon in certain portions of the West Side of Chicago on St. Patrick’s Day. As were “Remember the Alamo,” and “Remember the Maine” to the fighting men of the days that they were live things so were the habiliments of gentility to Billy Byrne at all times.

Billy Mallory was an older man than the mucker — twenty-four perhaps — and fully as large. For four years he had played right guard on a great eastern team, and for three he had pulled stroke upon the crew. During the two

years since his graduation he had prided himself upon the maintenance of the physical supremacy that had made the name of Mallory famous in collegiate athletics; but in one vital essential he was hopelessly handicapped in combat with such as Billy Byrne, for Mallory was a gentleman.

As the mucker rushed upward toward him Mallory had all the advantage of position and preparedness, and had he done what Billy Byrne would have done under like circumstances he would have planted a kick in the midst of the mucker's facial beauties with all the power and weight and energy at his command; but Billy Mallory could no more have perpetrated a cowardly trick such as this than he could have struck a woman.

Instead, he waited, and as the mucker came on an even footing with him Mallory swung a vicious right for the man's jaw. Byrne ducked beneath the blow, came up inside Mallory's guard, and struck him three times with trip-hammer velocity and pile-driver effectiveness—once upon the jaw and twice—below the belt!

The girl, clinging to the rail, riveted by the paralysis of fright, saw her champion stagger back and half crumple to the deck. Then she saw him make a brave and desperate rally, as, though torn with agony, he lurched forward in an endeavor to clinch with the brute before him. Again the mucker struck his victim—quick choppy hooks that rocked Mallory's head from side to side, and again the brutal blow below the belt; but with the tenacity of a bulldog the man fought for a hold upon his foe, and at last, notwithstanding Byrne's best efforts, he succeeded in closing with the mucker and dragging him to the deck.

Here the two men rolled and tumbled, Byrne biting, gouging, and kicking while Mallory devoted all of his fast-waning strength to an effort to close his fingers upon the throat of his antagonist. But the terrible punishment which

the mucker had inflicted upon him overcame him at last, and as Byrne felt the man's efforts weakening he partially disengaged himself and raising himself upon one arm dealt his now almost unconscious enemy a half-dozen frightful blows upon the face.

With a shriek Barbara Harding turned from the awful sight as Billy Mallory's bloody and swollen eyes rolled up and set, while the mucker threw the inert form roughly from him. Quick to the girl's memory sprang Mallory's recent declaration, which she had thought at the time but the empty, and vainglorious boasting of the man in love—"Why I'd die for you, Barbara, and welcome the chance!"

"Poor boy! How soon, and how terribly has the chance come!" moaned the girl.

Then a rough hand fell upon her arm.

"Here, youse," a coarse voice yelled in her ear. "Come out o' de trance," and at the same time she was jerked roughly toward the companionway.

Instinctively the girl held back, and then the mucker, true to his training, true to himself, gave her arm a sudden twist that wrenched a scream of agony from her white lips.

"Den come along," growled Billy Byrne, "an' quit dis monkey business, or I'll sure twist yer flipper clean off'm yeh."

With an oath, Anthony Harding sprang forward to protect his daughter; but the butt of Ward's pistol brought him unconscious to the deck.

"Go easy there, Byrne," shouted Skipper Simms; "there ain't no call to injure the hussy—a corpse won't be worth nothing to us."

In mute terror the girl now permitted herself to be led to the deck below. Quickly she was lowered into a waiting boat. Then Skipper Simms ordered Ward to search the yacht and remove all firearms, after which he was to engage

himself to navigate the vessel with her own crew under armed guard of half a dozen of the *Halfmoon's* cutthroats.

These things attended to, Skipper Simms with the balance of his own crew and six of the crew of the *Lotus* to take the places upon the brigantine of those left as a prize crew aboard the yacht returned with the girl to the *Halfmoon*.

The sailing vessel's sails were soon hoisted and trimmed, and in half an hour, followed by the *Lotus*, she was skudding briskly southward. For forty-eight hours this course was held until Simms felt assured that they were well out of the lane of regular trans-Pacific traffic.

During this time Barbara Harding had been kept below, locked in a small, untidy cabin. She had seen no one other than a great Negro who brought her meals to her three times daily—meals that she returned scarcely touched.

Now the *Halfmoon* was brought up into the wind where she lay with flapping canvas while Skipper Simms returned to the *Lotus* with the six men of the yacht's crew that he had brought aboard the brigantine with him two days before, and as many more of his own men.

Once aboard the *Lotus* the men were put to work with those already on the yacht. The boat's rudder was unshipped and dropped into the ocean; her fires were put out; her engines were attacked with sledges until they were little better than so much junk, and to make the slender chances of pursuit that remained to her entirely nil every ounce of coal upon her was shoveled into the Pacific. Her extra masts and spare sails followed the way of the coal and the rudder, so that when Skipper Simms and First Officer Ward left her with all of their own men that had been aboard her she was little better than a drifting derelict.

From her cabin window Barbara Harding had witnessed the wanton wrecking of her father's yacht, and when it was over and the crew of the brigantine had returned to their

own ship she presently felt the movement of the vessel as it got under way, and soon the *Lotus* dropped to the stern and beyond the range of her tiny port. With a moan of hopelessness and terror the girl sank prostrate across the hard berth that spanned one end of her prison cell.

How long she lay there she did not know, but finally she was aroused by the opening of her cabin door. As she sprang to her feet ready to defend herself against what she felt might easily be some new form of danger her eyes went wide in astonishment as they rested on the face of the man who stood framed in the doorway of her cabin.

“You?” she cried.

CHAPTER V

LARRY DIVINE UNMASKED

"YES, Barbara, it is I," said Mr. Divine; "and thank God that I am here to do what little any man may do against this band of murdering pirates."

"But, Larry," cried the girl, in evident bewilderment, "how did you come to be aboard this ship? How did you get here? What are you doing amongst such as these?"

"I am a prisoner," replied the man, "just as are you. I think they intend holding us for ransom. They got me in San Francisco. Slugged me and hustled me aboard the night before they sailed."

"Where are they going to take us?" she asked.

"I do not know," he replied, "although from something I have overheard of their conversations I imagine that they have in mind some distant island far from the beaten track of commerce. There are thousands such in the Pacific that are visited by vessels scarce once in a century. There they will hold us until they can proceed with the ship to some point where they can get into communication with their agents in the States. When the ransom is paid over to these agents they will return for us and land us upon some other island where our friends can find us, or leaving us where we can divulge the location of our whereabouts to those who pay the ransom."

The girl had been looking intently at Mr. Divine during their conversation.

"They cannot have treated you very badly, Larry," she said. "You are as well groomed and well fed, apparently, as ever."

A slight flush mounting to the man's face made the girl wonder a bit though it aroused no suspicion in her mind.

"Oh, no," he hastened to assure her, "they have not treated me at all badly—why should they? If I die they can collect no ransom on me. It is the same with you, Barbara, so I think you need apprehend no harsh treatment."

"I hope you are right, Larry," she said, but the hopelessness of her air rather belied any belief that aught but harm could come from captivity with such as those who officered and manned the *Halfmoon*.

"It seems so remarkable," she went on, "that you should be a prisoner upon the same boat. I cannot understand it. Why only a few days ago we received and entertained a friend of yours who brought a letter from you to papa—the Count de Cadenet."

Again that telltale flush mantled the man's cheek. He cursed himself inwardly for his lack of self-control. The girl would have his whole secret out of him in another half-hour if he were not more careful.

"They made me do that," he said, jerking his thumb in the general direction of Skipper Simms' cabin. "Maybe that accounts for their bringing me along. The 'Count de Cadenet' is a fellow named Theriere, second mate of this ship. They sent him to learn your plans; when you expected sailing from Honolulu and your course. They are all crooks and villains. If I hadn't done as they bid they would have killed me."

The girl made no comment, but Divine saw the contempt in her face.

"I didn't know that they were going to do this. If I had I'd have died before I'd have written that note," he added rather lamely.

The girl was suddenly looking very sad. She was thinking of Billy Mallory who had died in an effort to save her

The mental comparison she was making between him and Mr. Divine was not overly flattering to the latter gentleman.

"They killed poor Billy," she said at last. "He tried to protect me."

Then Mr. Divine understood the trend of her thoughts. He tried to find some excuse for his cowardly act; but with the realization of the true cowardliness and treachery of it that the girl didn't even guess he understood the futility of seeking to extenuate it. He saw that the chances were excellent that after all he would be compelled to resort to force or threats to win her hand at the last.

"Billy would have done better to have bowed to the inevitable as I did," he said. "Living I am able to help you now. Dead I could not have prevented them carrying out their intentions any more than Billy has, nor could I have been here to aid you now any more than he is. I cannot see that his action helped you to any great extent, brave as it was."

"The memory of it and him will always help me," she answered quietly. "They will help me to bear whatever is before me bravely, and, when the time comes, to die bravely; for I shall always feel that upon the other side a true, brave heart is awaiting me."

The man was silent. After a moment the girl spoke again.

"I think I would rather be alone, Larry," she said. "I am very unhappy and nervous. Possibly I could sleep now."

With a bow he turned and left the cabin.

For weeks the *Halfmoon* kept steadily on her course, a little south of west. There was no material change in the relations of those aboard her. Barbara Harding, finding herself unmolested, finally acceded to the repeated pleas of Mr. Divine, to whose society she had been driven by lone-

liness and fear, and appeared on deck frequently during the daylight watches. Here, one afternoon, she came face to face with Theriere for the first time since her abduction. The officer lifted his cap deferentially; but the girl met his look of expectant recognition with a cold, blank stare that passed through and beyond him as though he had been empty air.

A tinge of color rose to the man's face, and he continued on his way for a moment as though content to accept her rebuff; but after a step or two he turned suddenly and confronted her.

"Miss Harding," he said, respectfully, "I cannot blame you for the feeling of loathing and distrust you must harbor toward me; but in common justice I think you should hear me before finally condemning."

"I cannot imagine," she returned coldly, "what defense there can be for the cowardly act you perpetrated."

"I have been utterly deceived by my employers," said Theriere, hastening to take advantage of the tacit permission to explain which her reply contained. "I was given to understand that the whole thing was to be but a hoax—that I was taking part in a great practical joke that Mr. Divine was to play upon his old friends, the Hardings and their guests. Until they wrecked and deserted the *Lotus* in mid-ocean I had no idea that anything else was contemplated, although I felt that the matter, even before that event, had been carried quite far enough for a joke.

"They explained," he continued, "that before sailing you had expressed the hope that something really exciting and adventurous would befall the party—that you were tired of the monotonous humdrum of twentieth-century existence—that you regretted the decadence of piracy, and the expunging of romance from the seas.

"Mr. Divine, they told me, was a very wealthy young

man, to whom you were engaged to be married, and that he could easily afford the great expense of the rather remarkable hoax we were supposed to be perpetrating. I saw no harm in taking part in it, especially as I knew nothing of the supposititious purpose of the cruise until just before we reached Honolulu. Before that I had been led to believe that it was but a pleasure trip to the South Pacific that Mr. Divine intended.

"You see, Miss Harding, that I have been as badly deceived as you. Won't you let me help to atone for my error by being your friend? I can assure you that you will need one whom you can trust amongst this shioload of scoundrels."

"Who am I to believe?" cried the girl. "Mr. Divine assures me that he, too, has been forced into this affair, but by threats of death rather than deception."

The expression on Mr. Theriere's face was eloquent of sarcastic incredulity.

"How about the note of introduction that I carried to your father from Mr. Divine?" asked Theriere.

"He says that he was compelled to write it at the point of a revolver," replied the girl.

"Come with me, Miss Harding," said the officer. "I think that I may be able to convince you that Mr. Divine is not on any such bad terms with Skipper Simms as would be the case were his story to you true."

As he spoke he started toward the companionway leading to the officers' cabins. Barbara Harding hesitated at the top of the stairway.

"Have no fear, Miss Harding," Theriere reassured her. "Remember that I am your friend and that I am merely attempting to prove it to your entire satisfaction. You owe it to yourself to discover as soon as possible who your friends are aboard this ship, and who your enemies."

"Very well," said the girl. "I can be in no more danger one place aboard her than another."

Theriere led her directly to his own cabin, cautioning her to silence with upraised forefinger. Softly, like skulking criminals, they entered the little compartment. Then Theriere turned and closed the door, slipping the bolt noiselessly as he did so. Barbara watched him, her heart beating rapidly with fear and suspicion.

"Here," whispered Theriere, motioning her toward his berth. "I have found it advantageous to know what goes on beyond this partition. You will find a small round hole near the head of the berth, about a foot above the bedding. Put your ear to it and listen—I think Divine is in there now."

The girl, still frightened and fearful of the man's intentions, did, nevertheless, as he bid. At first she could make out nothing beyond the partition but a confused murmur of voices, and the clink of glass, as of the touch of the neck of a bottle against a goblet. For a moment she remained in tense silence, her ear pressed to the tiny aperture. Then, distinctly, she heard the voice of Skipper Simms.

"I'm a-tellin' you, man," he was saying, "that there wa'n't nothin' else to be done, an' I'm a-gettin' damn sick o' hearin' you findin' fault all the time with the way I been a-runnin' o' this little job."

"I'm not finding fault, Simms," returned another voice which the girl recognized immediately as Divine's; "although I do think that it was a mistake to so totally disable the *Lotus* as you did. Why how on earth are we ever to return to civilization if that boat is lost? Had she been simply damaged a little, in a way that they could themselves have fixed up, the delay would have been sufficient to permit us to escape, and then, when Miss Harding was returned in safety to her father, after our marriage, they would have been so

glad to be reunited that he easily could have been persuaded to drop the matter. Then another thing; you intended to demand a ransom for both Miss Harding and myself, to carry out the fiction of my having been stolen also—how can you do that if Mr. Harding be dead? And do you suppose for a moment that Miss Harding will leave a single stone unturned to bring the guilty to justice if any harm has befallen her father or his guests? If so you do not know her as well as I.”

The girl turned away from the partition, her face white and drawn, her eyes inexpressibly sad. She rose to her feet, facing Theriere.

“I have heard quite enough, thank you, Mr. Theriere,” she said.

“You are convinced then that I am your friend?” he asked.

“I am convinced that Mr. Divine is not,” she replied non-committally.

She took a step toward the door. Theriere stood looking at her. She was unquestionably very good to look at. He could not remember ever having seen a more beautiful girl. A great desire to seize her in his arms swept over the man. Theriere had never often made any effort to harness his desires. What he wanted it had been his custom to take—by force if necessary. He took a step toward Barbara Harding. There was a sudden light in his eyes that the girl had not before seen there, and she reached quickly toward the knob of the door.

Theriere was upon her, and then, quickly, he mastered himself, for he recalled his coolly thought-out plan based on what Divine had told him of that clause in the will of the girl’s departed grandparent which stipulated that the man who shared the bequest with her must be the choice of both herself and her father. He could afford to bide his time, and

play the chivalrous protector before he essayed the rôle of lover.

Barbara had turned a half-frightened look toward him as he advanced—in doubt as to his intentions.

“Pardon me, Miss Harding,” he said; “the door is bolted—let me unlatch it for you,” and very gallantly he did so, swinging the portal wide that she might pass out. “I feared interruption,” he said, in explanation of the bolt.

In silence they returned to the upper deck. The intoxication of sudden passion now under control, Theriere was again master of himself and ready to play the cold, calculating, waiting game that he had determined upon. Part of his plan was to see just enough of Miss Harding to insure a place in her mind at all times; but not enough to suggest that he was forcing himself upon her. Rightly, he assumed that she would appreciate thoughtful deference to her comfort and safety under the harrowing conditions of her present existence more than a forced companionship that might entail too open devotion on his part. And so he raised his cap and left her, only urging her to call upon him at any time that he might be of service to her.

Left alone the girl became lost in unhappy reflections, and in the harrowing ordeal of attempting to readjust herself to the knowledge that Larry Divine, her lifelong friend, was the instigator of the atrocious villainy that had been perpetrated against her and her father. She found it almost equally difficult to believe that Mr. Theriere was so much more sinned against than sinning as he would have had her believe. And yet, did his story not sound even more plausible than that of Divine which she had accepted before Theriere had made it possible for her to know the truth? Why, then, was it so difficult for her to believe the Frenchman? She could not say, but in the inmost recesses of her heart she knew that she mistrusted and feared the man.

As she stood leaning against the rail, buried deep in thought, Billy Byrne passed close behind her. At sight of her a sneer curled his lip. How he hated her! Not that she ever had done aught to harm him, but rather because she represented to him in concrete form all that he had learned to hate and loathe since early childhood.

Her soft, white skin; her shapely hands and well-cared-for nails; her trim figure and perfectly fitting suit all taunted him with their superiority over him and his kind. He knew that she looked down upon him as an inferior being. She was of the class that addressed those in his walk of life as, "my man." Lord, how he hated that appellation!

The intentness of his gaze upon her back, had the effect so often noted by the observant, and suddenly aroused from the lethargy of her misery the girl swung around to meet the man's eyes squarely upon her. Instantly she recognized him as the brute who had killed Billy Mallory. If there had been hate in the mucker's eyes as he looked at the girl, it was as nothing by comparison with the loathing and disgust which sprang to hers as they rested upon his sullen face.

So deep was her feeling of contempt for this man, that the sudden appearance of him before her startled a single exclamation from her.

"Coward!" came the one word, involuntarily, from her lips.

The man's scowl deepened menacingly. He took a threatening step toward her.

"Wot's dat?" he growled. "Don't get gay wit me, or I'll black dem lamps fer yeh," and he raised a heavy fist as though to strike her.

The mucker had looked to see the girl cower before his threatened blow—that would have been ample atonement for her insult, and would have appealed greatly to his Kelly-

gang sense of humor. Many a time had he threatened women thus, for the keen enjoyment of hearing their screams of fright and seeing them turn and flee in terror. When they had held their ground and opposed him, as some upon the West Side had felt sufficiently muscular to do, the mucker had not hesitated to "hand them one." Thus only might a man uphold his reputation for bravery in the vicinage of Grand Avenue.

He had looked to see this girl of the effete and effeminate upper class swoon with terror before him; but to his intense astonishment she but stood erect and brave before him, her head high held, her eyes cold and level and unafraid. And then she spoke again.

"Coward!" she said.

Billy almost struck her; but something held his hand. What, he could not understand. Could it be that he feared this slender girl? And at this juncture, when the threat of his attitude was the most apparent, Second Officer Theriere came upon the scene. At a glance he took in the situation, and with a bound had sprung between Billy Byrne and Barbara Harding.

CHAPTER VI

THE MUCKER AT BAY

WHAT has this man said to you, Miss Harding?" cried Theriere. "Has he offered you harm?"

"I do not think that he would have dared strike me," replied the girl, "though he threatened to do so. He is the coward who murdered poor Mr. Mallory upon the *Lotus*. He might stoop to anything after that."

Theriere turned angrily upon Byrne.

"Go below!" he shouted. "I'll attend to you later. If Miss Harding were not here I'd thrash you within an inch of your life now. And if I ever hear of your speaking to her again, or offering her the slightest indignity I'll put a bullet through you so quick you won't know what has struck you."

"T'ell yeh will?" sneered Billy Byrne. "I got your number, yeh big stiff; an' yeh better not get gay wit me. Dey ain't no guy on board dis man's ship dat can hand Billy Byrne dat kin' o' guff an' get away wit it—see?" and before Theriere knew what had happened a heavy fist had caught him upon the point of the chin and lifted him clear off the deck to drop him unconscious at Miss Harding's feet.

"Yeh see wot happens to guys dat get gay wit me?" said the mucker to the girl, and then stooping over the prostrate form of the mate Billy Byrne withdrew a huge revolver from Theriere's hip pocket.

"I guess I'll need dis gat in my business purty soon," he remarked.

Then he planted a vicious kick in the face of the unconscious man and went his way to the forecandle.

"Now maybe she'll tink Billy Byrne's a coward," he thought, as he disappeared below.

Barbara Harding stood speechless with shock at the brutality and ferocity of the unexpected attack upon Theriere. Never in all her life had she dreamed that there could exist upon the face of the earth a thing in human form so devoid of honor, and chivalry, and fair play as the creature that she had just witnessed threatening a defenseless woman, and kicking an unconscious man in the face; but then Barbara Harding had never lived between Grand Avenue and Lake Street, and Halsted and Robey where standards of masculine bravery are strange and fearful.

When she had recovered her equanimity she hastened to the head of the cabin companionway and called aloud for help. Instantly Skipper Simms and First Officer Ward rushed on deck, each carrying a revolver in readiness for the conflict with their crew that these two worthies were always expecting.

Barbara pointed out the still form of Theriere, quickly explaining what had occurred.

"It was the fellow Byrne who did it," she said. "He has gone into the forecandle now, and he has a revolver that he took from Mr. Theriere after he had fallen."

Several of the crew had now congregated about the prostrate officer.

"Here you," cried Skipper Simms to a couple of them; "you take Mr. Theriere below to his cabin, an' throw cold water in his face. Mr. Ward, get some brandy from my locker, an' try an' bring him to. The rest of you arm yourselves with crowbars and axes, an' see that that son of a sea cook don't get out on deck again alive. Hold him there 'til I get a couple of guns. Then we'll get him, damn him!"

Skipper Simms hastened below while two of the men were carrying Theriere to his cabin and Mr. Ward was fetching the brandy. A moment later Barbara Harding saw the skipper return to the upper deck with a rifle and two revolvers. The sailors whom he had detailed to keep Byrne below were gathered about the hatchway leading to the forecastle. Some of them were exchanging profane and pleasant badinage with the prisoner.

"Yeh better come up an' get killed easy-like," one called down to the mucker. "We're apt to muss yeh all up down there in the dark with these here axes and crowbars, an' then wen we send yeh home yer pore maw won't know her little boy at all."

"Yeh come on down here, an' try mussin' me up," yelled back Billy Byrne. "I can lick de whole gang wit one han' tied behin' me—see?"

"De skipper's gorn to get his barkers, Billy," cried Bony Sawyer. "Yeh better come up an' stan' trial if he gives yeh the chanct."

"Stan' nothin'," sneered Billy. "Swell chanct I'd have wit him an' Squint Eye holdin' court over me. Not on yer life, Bony. I'm here, an' here I stays till I croaks, but yeh better believe me, I'm goin' to croak a few before I goes, so if any of you ginks are me frien's yeh better keep outen here so's yeh won't get hurted. An' anudder ting I'm goin' to do afore I cashes in—I'm goin' to put a few of dem ginks in de cabin wise to where dey stands wit one anudder. If I don't start someting before I goes out me name's not Billy Byrne."

At this juncture Skipper Simms appeared with the three weapons he had gone to his cabin to fetch. He handed one to Bony Sawyer, another to Red Sanders and a third to a man by the name of Wison.

"Now, my men," said Skipper Simms, "we will go below

and bring Byrne up. Bring him alive if you can — but bring him.”

No one made a move to enter the forecandle.

“Go on now, move quickly,” commanded Skipper Simms sharply.

“Thought he said ‘we’,” remarked one of the sailors.

Skipper Simms, livid with rage, turned to search out the offender from the several men behind him.

“Who was that?” he roared. “Show me the blitherin’ swab. Jes’ show him to me, I tell you, an’ I’ll learn him. Now you,” he yelled at the top of his voice, turning again to the men he had ordered into the forecandle after Billy Byrne, “you cowardly landlubbers you, get below there quick afore I kick you below.”

Still no one moved to obey him. From white he went to red, and then back to white again. He fairly frothed at the mouth as he jumped up and down, cursing the men, and threatening. But all to no avail. They would not go.

“Why, Skipper,” spoke up Bony Sawyer, “it’s sure death for any man as goes below there. It’s easier, an’ safer, to starve him out.”

“Starve nothin’,” shrieked Skipper Simms. “Do you reckon I’m a-goin’ to sit quiet here for a week an’ let any blanked wharf rat own that there fo’c’s’le just because I got a lot o’ white-livered cowards aboard? No sir! You’re a-goin’ down after that would-be bad man an’ fetch him up dead or alive,” and with that he started menacingly toward the three who stood near the hatch, holding their fire arms safely out of range of Billy Byrne below.

What would have happened had Skipper Simms completed the threatening maneuver he had undertaken can never be known, for at this moment Theriere pushed his way through the circle of men who were interested spectators of the impending tragedy.

"What's up, sir?" he asked of Simms. "Anything that I can help you with?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the skipper; "so you ain't dead after all, eh? Well that don't change the looks of things a mite. We gotta get that man outa there an' these flea-bitten imitations of men ain't got the guts to go in after him."

"He's got your gun, sir," spoke up Wison, "an' Gawd knows he be the one as'ud on'y be too glad for the chanct to use it."

"Let me see if I can't handle him, sir," said Theriere to Skipper Simms. "We don't want to lose any men if we can help it."

The skipper was only too glad to welcome this unexpected rescue from the predicament in which he had placed himself. How Theriere was to accomplish the subjugation of the mutinous sailor he could not guess, nor did he care so long as it was done without risk to his own skin.

"Now if you'll go away, sir," said Theriere, "and order the men away I'll see what I can do."

Skipper Simms did as Theriere had requested, so that presently the officer stood alone beside the hatch. Across the deck, amidships, the men had congregated to watch Theriere's operations, while beyond them stood Barbara Harding held fascinated by the grim tragedy that was unfolding before her upon this accursed vessel.

Theriere leaned over the open hatch, in full view of the waiting Byrne, ready below. There was the instant report of a firearm and a bullet whizzed close past Theriere's head.

"Avast there, Byrne!" he shouted. "It's I, Theriere. Don't shoot again, I want to speak to you."

"No monkey business now," growled the mucker in reply. "I won't miss again."

"I want to talk with you, Byrne," said Theriere in a low tone. "I'm coming down there."

"No you ain't, cul," returned Byrne; "leastways yeh ain't a-comin' down here alive."

"Yes I am, Byrne," replied Theriere, "and you don't want to be foolish about it. I'm unarmed. You can cover me with your gun until you have satisfied yourself as to that. I'm the only man on the ship that can save your life—the only man that has any reason to want to; but we've got to talk it over and we can't talk this way where there's a chance of being overheard. I'll be on the square with you if you will with me, and if we can't come to terms I'll come above again and you won't be any worse off than you are now. Here I come," and without waiting for an acceptance of his proposition the second officer of the *Halfmoon* slipped over the edge of the hatchway and disappeared from the sight of the watchers above.

That he was a brave man even Billy Byrne had to admit, and those above who knew nothing of the relations existing between the second mate and the sailor, who had so recently felled him, thought that his courage was little short of marvelous. Theriere's stock went up by leaps and bounds in the estimation of the sailors of the *Halfmoon*, for degraded though they were they could understand and appreciate physical courage of this sort, while to Barbara Harding the man's act seemed unparalleled in its utter disregard of the consequences of life and death to himself that it entailed. She suddenly was sorry that she had entertained any suspicions against Theriere—so brave a man could not be other than the soul of honor, she argued.

Once below Theriere found himself covered by his own revolver in the hands of a very desperate and a very unprincipled man. He smiled at Byrne as the latter eyed him suspiciously.

"See here, Byrne," said Theriere. "It would be foolish for me to say that I am doing this for love of you. The

fact is that I need you. We cannot succeed, either one of us, alone. I think you made a fool play when you hit me today. You know that our understanding was that I was to be even a little rougher with you than usual, in order to avoid suspicion being attached to any seeming familiarity between us, should we be caught conferring together. I had the chance to bawl you out today, and I thought that you would understand that I was but taking advantage of the opportunity which it afforded to make it plain to Miss Harding that there could be nothing other than hatred between us—it might have come in pretty handy later to have her believe that.

“If I’d had any idea that you really intended hitting me you’d have been a dead man before your fist reached me, Byrne. You took me entirely by surprise; but that’s all in the past—I’m willing to let bygones be bygones, and help you out of the pretty pickle you’ve got yourself into. Then we can go ahead with our work as though nothing had happened. What do you say?”

“I didn’t know yeh was kiddin’,” replied the mucker, “or I wouldn’t have hit yeh. Yeh acted like yeh meant it.”

“Very well, that part’s understood,” said Theriere. “Now will you come out if I can square the thing with the skipper so’s you won’t get more than a day or so in irons—he’ll have to give you something to save his own face; but I promise that you’ll get your food regularly and that you won’t be beaten up the way you were before when he had you below. If he won’t agree to what I propose I give you my word to tell you so.”

“Go ahead,” said Billy Byrne; “I don’t trust nobody wen I don’t have to; but I’ll be dinged if I see any other way out of it.”

Theriere returned to the deck and seeking out the skipper drew him to one side.

“I can get him up peaceably if I can assure him that he’ll only get a day or so in the cooler, with full rations and no beatings. I think, sir, that that will be the easiest way out of it. We cannot spare a man now—if we want to get the fellow later we can always find some pretext.”

“Very well, Mr. Theriere,” replied the skipper, “I’ll leave the matter entirely in your hands—you can do what you want with the fellow; it’s you as had your face punched.”

Theriere returned immediately to the forecandle, from which he presently emerged with the erstwhile recalcitrant Byrne, and for two days the latter languished in durance vile, and that was the end of the episode, though its effects were manifold. For one thing it implanted in the heart of Theriere a personal hatred for the mucker, so that while heretofore his intention of ridding himself of the man when he no longer needed him was due purely to a matter of policy, it was now reinforced by a keen desire for personal revenge. The occurrence had also had its influence upon Barbara Harding, in that it had shown her Mr. Theriere in a new light—one that reflected credit upon him. She had thought his magnanimous treatment of the sailor little short of heroic; and it had deepened the girl’s horror of Billy Byrne until it now amounted to little short of an obsession. So vivid an impression had his brutality made upon her that she would start from deep slumber, dreaming that she was menaced by him.

After Billy was released for duty following his imprisonment, he several times passed the girl upon deck. He noticed that she shrank from him in disgust and terror; but what surprised him was that instead of the thrill of pride which he formerly would have felt at this acknowledgment of his toughness, for Billy prided himself on being a tough, he now felt a singular resentment against the girl for her attitude, so that he came to hate her even more than he had before.

hated. Formerly he had hated her for the things she stood for, now he hated her for herself.

Theriere was often with her now, and, less frequently, Divine; for at the second officer's suggestion Barbara had not acquainted that gentleman with the fact that she was aware of his duplicity.

"It is just as well not to let him know," said Theriere. "It gives you an advantage that would be wanting should he suspect the truth, so that now you are always in a position to be warned in plenty of time against any ulterior suggestion he may make. Keep me posted as to all he tells you of his plans, and in this way we can defeat him much more easily than as though you followed your natural inclinations and refused to hold communication of any sort with him. It might be well, Miss Harding, even to encourage him in the hope that you will wed him voluntarily. I think that that would throw him entirely off his guard, and pave the way for your early release."

"Oh, I doubt if I could do that, Mr. Theriere," exclaimed the girl. "You cannot imagine how I loathe the man now that I know him in his true colors. For years he has importuned me to marry him, and though I never cared for him in that way at all, and never could, I felt that he was a very good friend and that his constancy demanded some return on my part—my friendship and sympathy at least; but now I shiver whenever he is near me, just as I would were I to find a snake coiled close beside me. I cannot abide treachery."

"Nor I, Miss Harding," agreed Theriere glibly. "The man deserves nothing but your contempt, though for policy's sake I hope that you will find it possible to lead him on until his very treachery proves the means of your salvation, for believe me, if he has been false to you how much more quickly will he be false to Simms and Ward! He would

ditch them in a minute if the opportunity presented itself for him to win you without their aid. I had thought it might be feasible to lead him into attempting to take the ship by force, and return you to San Francisco, or, better still possibly, to the nearest civilized port.

"You might, with propriety suggest this to him, telling him that you believe that I would stand ready to assist in the undertaking. I can promise you the support of several of the men—quite a sufficient number with Divine and myself, easily to take the *Halfmoon* away from her present officers."

"I will think over your suggestion, Mr. Theriere," replied Barbara, "and I thank you for the generous impulse that has prompted you to befriend me—heaven knows how badly I need a friend now among so many enemies. What is it, Mr. Theriere? What is the matter?"

The officer had turned his eyes casually toward the southeast as the girl spoke, and just now he had given a sudden exclamation of surprise and alarm.

"That cloud Miss Harding," he answered. "We're in for a bad blow, and it'll be on us in a minute," and with that he started forward on a run, calling back over his shoulder, "you'd better go below at once."

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CHAPTER VII

THE TYPHOON

THE storm that struck the *Halfmoon* took her entirely unaware. It had sprung, apparently, out of a perfectly clear sky. Both the lookout and the man at the wheel were ready to take oath that they had scanned the horizon not a half-minute before Second Mate Theriere had come racing forward bellowing for all hands on deck and ordering a sailor below to report the menacing conditions to Captain Simms.

Before that officer reached the deck Theriere had the entire crew aloft taking in sail; but though they worked with the desperation of doomed men they were only partially successful in their efforts.

The sky and sea had assumed a sickly yellowish color, except for the mighty black cloud that raced toward them, low over the water. The low moaning sound that had followed the first appearance of the storm, gave place to a sullen roar, and then, of a sudden, the thing struck the *Halfmoon*, ripping her remaining canvas from her as it had been wrought from tissue paper, and with the flying canvas, spars, and cordage went the mainmast, snapping ten feet above the deck, and crashing over the starboard bow with a noise and jar that rose above the bellowing of the typhoon.

Fully half the crew of the *Halfmoon* either went down with the falling rigging or were crushed by the crashing weight of the mast as it hurtled against the deck. Skipper Simms rushed back and forth screaming out curses that none heeded, and orders that there was none to fill.

Theriere, on his own responsibility, looked to the hatches. Ward with a handful of men armed with axes attempted to chop away the wreckage, for the jagged butt of the fallen mast was dashing against the ship's side with such vicious blows that it seemed but a matter of seconds ere it would stave a hole in her.

With the utmost difficulty a sea anchor was rigged and tumbled over the *Halfmoon's* pitching bow into the angry sea, that was rising to more gigantic proportions with each succeeding minute. This frail makeshift which at best could but keep the vessel's bow into the wind, saving her from instant engulfment in the sea's trough, seemed to Theriere but a sorry means of prolonging the agony of suspense preceding the inevitable end. That nothing could save them was the second officer's firm belief, nor was he alone in his conviction. Not only Simms and Ward, but every experienced sailor on the ship felt that the life of the *Halfmoon* was now but a matter of hours, possibly minutes, while those of lesser experience were equally positive that each succeeding wave must mark the termination of the lives of the vessel and her company.

The deck, washed now almost continuously by hurtling tons of storm-mad water, as one mountainous wave followed another the length of the ship, had become entirely impossible. With difficulty the men were attempting to get below between waves. All semblance of discipline had vanished. For the most part they were a pack of howling, cursing, terror-ridden beasts, fighting at the hatches with those who would have held them closed against the danger of each new assault of the sea.

Ward and Skipper Simms had been among the first to seek the precarious safety below deck. Theriere alone of the officers had remained on duty until the last, and now he was exerting his every faculty in the effort to save as many of

the men as possible without losing the ship in the doing of it. Only between waves was the entrance to the main cabins negotiable, while the forecastle hatch had been abandoned entirely after it had with difficulty been replaced following the retreat of three of the crew to that part of the ship.

The mucker stood beside Theriere as the latter beat back the men when the seas threatened. It was the man's first experience of the kind. Never had he faced death in the courage-blighting form which the grim harvester assumes when he calls unbridled Nature to do his ghastly bidding. The mucker saw the rough, brawling bullies of the fore-castle reduced to white-faced, gibbering cowards, clawing and fighting to climb over one another toward the lesser danger of the cabins, while the mate fought them off, except as he found it expedient to let them pass him; he alone cool and fearless.

Byrne stood as one apart from the dangers and hysteric strivings of his fellows. Once when Theriere happened to glance in his direction the Frenchman mentally ascribed the mucker's seeming lethargy to the paralysis of abject cowardice. "The fellow is in a blue funk," thought the second mate; "I did not misjudge him—like all his kind he is a coward at heart."

Then a great wave came, following unexpectedly close upon the heels of a lesser one. It took Theriere off his guard, threw him down and hurtled him roughly across the deck, landing him in the scuppers, bleeding and stunned. The next wave would carry him overboard.

Released from surveillance the balance of the crew pushed and fought their way into the cabin—only the mucker remained without, staring first at the prostrate form of the mate and then at the open cabin hatch. Had one been watching him he might reasonably have thought that the man's mind was in a muddle of confused thoughts and fears; but